



## AN ECO- CENTRIC READING OF AMITAV GHOSH'S 'THE LIVING MOUNTAIN: A FABLE FOR OUR TIMES'

Dr. T. Mangayarkarasi<sup>1</sup>, Maalya S. Jayan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Asst. Professor, Department of English, Rani Anna Government College for Women, Tirunelveli, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University

<sup>2</sup> Research Scholar, Department of English, Rani Anna Government College for Women, Tirunelveli, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University

### ABSTRACT

Eco centric discourse is characterised by an unprecedented ongoing concern of the latest technologies over the traditional ethnic society or its cultural 'other'. This accounts to the contemporary techno-savvy life situation of diasporic cross-cultural exchanges, its function is conducive to the marketing strategy of globalized community culture. It is in this perspective of the globalized cultural imbroglio that Amitav Ghosh's fictional creations become significant as post-colonial eco-centric critiques of contemporary polity.

Eco centrism is a philosophy or perspective that places intrinsic value on all living organisms and their natural environment, regardless of their perceived usefulness or importance to human being. In most of the works, Amitav Ghosh indicates the relationship between nature and human being. Environmental deterioration has assumed alarming dimensions worldwide with global warming, carbon emissions and acid rain, and portrays a very grim picture of the future mankind. 'The Living Mountain' is about the loss of an ecological way of life. It combines the element of science, fiction, fantasy and magical realism to modify the reality and make the readers to think from an outsider's perspective. This paper attempts to explain the relationship between man and nature and how the destructive activities of human beings affect the ecology. It also aims analyse the postcolonial aspects of struggle for salvation, culture and tradition, social, political and ecological developments.

**KEYWORDS:** Ecocentrism, Environment, Climate change, Techno-Savy Age

### INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh's treatment of history conjoined with his unique narrative mode weaves delicate connections between mankind and nature. 'The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times' reveals Amitav Ghosh's concern with the issues of exploitative power structures. Eco centrism is an interdisciplinary field that studies literature as well as the environment. It is a term used in ecological philosophy to describe a value system that is oriented on nature rather than humans. It is an environmental and ethical attitude that argues that ecological concern should be over and above human priorities. At the present time, the ecological system on earth is continuously losing its balance, especially after the scientific inventions and uncontrolled industrialisation. Ecologist Aldo Leopold in Sand County Almanac speaks of the classic evocation of ecocentrism in 'The Land Ethic'.

Amitav Ghosh's novels are based on historical events and the effects they had on environment. He is a well-known novelist of social concern. He has discussed various ecological issues like the destruction of environment, the exploitation of natural resources and the effect of global warming on the world in his creative works. With the growing population, there is a growing demand for resources. The works of Ghosh are very relevant today as human beings are facing a climate catastrophe. His works are mostly studied from an anthropocentric, historical and cross - cultural perspectives, but also his works need to examine from an eco-centric lens.

Amitav Ghosh wrote 'The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times' during the pandemic period of 2022. It is about the loss of an ecological way of life. It is also about the struggle of human to find a way to live in a changing environment. Ghosh indicates his concerns of environmental difficulties. He explores the delicate balance between human and nature, and the traumatic impact of human activity on the environment. His narrative is a mixture of fiction and reality. He makes use of nature and its environment as a tool to investigate human life. In the novel 'The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times', Amitav Ghosh creates an image of contemporary reality of today's world. The natives of the land respected nature and the stories of their ancestors told them. They worshipped the land and in return the land will protect and take care of them. The Anthropoi's are the invaders who invade the valley and conquered the 'Mahaparbat' by slaving the varvaroi's or the valley people. Even though the natives are fascinated by the coloniser's ideologies and share the secrets of the land, they realised that their land has been exploited. It can be applied to any colony of imperial powers and can be related to man's greed to acquire more wealth. Ghosh sends a signal to warn the whole world about man's selfish mindset which will bring disaster and calamity to mankind.

The storyline is improving through Maansi's dream in which she is a young girl in one of the villages in Himalaya. The snowy mountain mentioned in this story is

called the 'Mahaparbat' and its peak is always filled with clouds. According to their ancestors it is the most alive mountain and they never set foot on its slopes. The 'Mahaparbat' is rich with everything and there was a magic tree which feeds the people of the valley, providing them delicious fruits, scented nuts and honey. The villagers exchange some of these gifts with people from the lowlands, but they never let these traders enter their valley. Once in every year the elder men and women would go to meet the visiting merchants. The people loved to listen stories about the mountain, loved to sing their songs and most of all, to dance. Dances were led by women and the most skilled of them were known as 'adepts'.

A strange new kind called 'Anthropoi' appeared on the mountain pass and he wanted to go inside the valley to see their herbs, mushrooms, nuts and honey with his own eyes. The elders did not allow him to enter, so he collected all the information about the 'Mahaparbat' as much as he can, and left with a threatening kind of promise: "I am sure we will see each other again". After some years, the anthropoi came back with their forces to climb and exploit the riches of mountain. They decided to fight and some of the villagers were defeated, some were tricked into attacking neighbours, others were seduced to inactive with drugs. The anthropoi dismissed all the elder people, imprisoned 'adepts' and forbade all ceremonies, songs stories and dances.

Eventually, the valley people shifted away from the mountain and attached to the view of climb. They wished to ascend the slopes themselves. The anthropoi called the valley people as varvaroi. They couldn't climb the mountain as the anthropoi did. The climb was really difficult for them because anthropoi dirtied the slopes with trash. Climbing of the villagers created many mudslides and many of them were killed. But they could not reach the mountain's cloud-wrapped top. So, there was a change of heart among the anthropoi because of these painful incidents. They became friendly to valley people and shared their knowledge. From the savants, they get to know that the mountain could support only a small number of climbers or else the ice would melt and drown the valley and sweep everything away. The gap between varvaroi and anthropoi closed so rapidly. They realised there was some wisdom in the people's belief after all. They requested valley people for their old stories, songs and dances. But the people forgot everything so they began to search for someone who remember anything about old ways. Finally, they found an old woman once been an adept. She performed the dance and they could feel the heartbeat of the mountain under their feet as an answer to the dance. But inside her mind, the adept is still angry towards the anthropoi who destroyed their old life in the mountain. Amitav Ghosh allegorically represent the history of exploitation of colonised people and the natural environment. He also indicating the abuse of nature and the relationship between human beings and nature.

According to the young Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg, "The climate crisis is not just about the environment. It is a crisis of human rights, of

justice, and of political will. Colonial, racist and patriarchal systems of oppression have created and fuelled it. We need to dismantle them all. Our political leaders can no longer shirk their responsibilities". Amitav Ghosh speaks of way that humans interact with nature and other species depends on their cultural background. Nature is worshipped as God in some cultures and used as a source of livelihood in others. It is a fact that people's attitude towards nature is different and many of these differences are influenced by culture. The select work of Ghosh exemplifies the impact of spoiled environment on human beings. What surrounds mankind is our environment which includes air, water, earth, flora, fauna, human beings and their activities. It is our environment that sustains and supports life. Every nation wants the human development to the maximum. But it should be sustainable. The rapidly increasing consumerism degraded the condition of our ecology to the worse. Instead of trying to adapt himself to the environment, man is foolishly trying to change it to suit his consumerism.

In Amitav Ghosh's opinion people are now resisting the development activities that are taking the roll on the environment. For example, in Neyamgari, Odisha, the adivasi's have resisted a mining company on the grounds that it will destroy their sacred mountain. The problem is everywhere across in India. The forests are being exploited in the name of mining or development interests. Hundreds or thousands of people have to lose their lands, environment and livelihood. The progress or development is only for the tiny group of industrialists and corporates who are estimating everything in terms of money without knowing the value of anything. 'The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times' reveals that man's domination over nature and anthropocentric attitude is harmful to the environment. The book makes the readers to analyse themselves what we lose when we separate from the nature. Human beings think that they are superior to all other species and they have power to control everything. If one is more powerful, then he/she needs to be more responsible to care about other species that human beings and other living organism share this planet with. The work brings an awareness to the readers with a hard – hitting truth that man should change the anthropocentric behaviour to eco centrism.

The present paper is instigated by a close reading of Amitav Ghosh's work 'The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times' reveals a common thread of postcolonial concern over the subaltern consciousness and the distorted history and culture of India. Like other Amitav Ghosh's literary creations, 'The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times' too depicts the material conditions of postcolonial societies where the experiences of colonialism, the struggle for liberation and the de-humanising decadent social, political and environmental developments that follow independence exercise an enduring impact. Amitav Ghosh views culture and environment as a historically derived social construct forming a continuum that originates from the past, goes through the present and projects into the future.

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